

The Modern Cobbler

Kegan Schouwenburg, 31
 Founder and CEO, Sols

3-D printing is sexy. Orthotics are...less sexy. But Schouwenburg attracted millions in funding by merging the two, and understanding everything about her customers' feet.

Podiatrist-made foot supports don't exactly leap to mind when thinking about 3-D printing. What sparked the connection for you?

I was working at a 3-D printing manufacturer and saw that most of the things that came through didn't make sense for the technology. 3-D printing really works when it improves a product through customization. I have terrible feet and started wearing orthotics at 6 years old. It's such an unsexy industry that no one's really paying attention to it. But that means there's plenty to do.

How does Sols work?

You download our app and take photos of your feet, and within 30 seconds those photos are processed and turned into custom inserts. They're 3-D printed at our factory near Austin and shipped within a week. Sols are sold through podiatrists—we have more than 1,000 partners—but consumers can also buy them directly. The inserts are better than what's out there and cheaper, so consumers come back and order multiple pairs. We've seen 50 percent month-over-month growth with orders. People do not want to move their orthotics from shoe to shoe to shoe.

You've raised \$23 million and have more than 30 employees. What's been the biggest challenge of scaling?

Hiring cross-discipline is way more challenging than I expected. Whether you're building a software team when you're not technical or building a product team when you're not a designer, it's just really, really, really hard. I used to try to do it all myself, but I've learned the best thing is to build a network. The tech world is one big network of Harvard and Stanford grads. You think I'm joking, but I'm not. If you want something, ask for introductions, work those relationships. That's the way the world works. —*Kate Rockwood*

Kegan Schouwenburg,
 photographed in
 New York City.